A Study of Thai Transgender Employee's Perceptions of Discrimination at Work and Their Job Attitudes and Wellbeing

Munchuree Kaosayapandhu[1]

Abstract

This research examined the work experiences of transgender employees in Thailand. The objectives were to 1) learn about the experiences of transgender employees and how they are treated in their workplaces; 2) assess transgender employees' wellbeing at work and 3) determine transgender employees' job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. This research was conducted as a qualitative study to gain insights into the issues facing transgender employees in Thai workplaces. Data was collected during a series of interviews (n = 11) with a purposively selected sample of transgender workers representing a wide variety of industries. Content analysis was employed for analyzing interview data. The results indicated that the experiences of transgender employees in Thailand are mixed. While they are typically well-treated by supervisors, some have been harassed or disrespected by colleagues, all have experienced hiring discrimination during hiring, and several noted that laws and benefits programs are often discriminatory toward transgender people. Some transgender employees describe themselves as satisfied and others as disengaged from their work. Those who are satisfied are more likely to show commitment to their organizations as indicated by positive attitudes and emotional attachment to them. On the other hand, those who are disengaged show no commitment to their organizations and are more likely to seek other work due to unhappiness with their jobs. The problems that negatively affect transgender employees' wellbeing, satisfaction, and organizational commitment could be mitigated by eliminating the systemic discrimination (particularly hiring discrimination) that leads to high rates of unemployment and poverty for transgender people, and by changing negative societal and workplace attitudes.

Keywords : Transgender, Discrimination, Wellbeing, Job satisfaction, Turnover intention

1. Introduction

Transgender people include male-to-female and female-to-male transsexuals, those who identify as genderqueer or gender variant, and anyone else whose assigned birth gender does not match their gender identity (Brewster et al.,2014). While there has been some social and legislative progress in recent years, many transgender people still experience discrimination and harassment in the workplace (Badgett et al., 2009; Brewster et al., 2014; Budge et al., 2013; Fosbrook, 2019; Grant et al., 2011). In Thailand, transgender employees surveyed by the UNDP (2018) gave their coworkers, subordinates, supervisors, clients, and human resources departments scores of just 3.4 to 3.6 out of 5 for acceptance of transgender people in the workplace. Moreover, those who said they had experienced discrimination reported lower job satisfaction and were more likely to seek different employment, thereby demonstrating reduced commitment to their organizations. Mistreatment of transgender employees is a human rights violation, but it is also an economic issue because it can harm the economic development of emerging economies such as Thailand. Badgett et al. (2014), who conducted a study of 39 nations, found that failure to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and treat them equally within schools and the labor market, increases the likelihood that they will be unemployed or underemployed and their skills and potential economic contributions lost to the economy. On the other hand, nations that protect the rights of LGBT people, as indicated by Global Index on Legal Recognition of Homosexual Orientation (GILRHO) and the Transgender Rights Index (TRI) scores, have higher gross domestic products (GDPs). There is also preliminary evidence from a small number of studies 2 suggesting that LGBT-supportive policies and work environments reduce health insurance costs, increase stock prices, and enhance employee creativity and

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1 Munchuree Kaosayapandhu, Faculty of Humanities, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand
[Postal Address: 114 Soi Sukhumvit 23, Khlong Toei Nuea, Watthana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand]
Email: munchuree@g.swu.ac.th

productivity (Badgett et al., 2013). Thus, both moral and economic arguments can be made for protecting the rights and safety of transgender workers.

In recent years, researchers have taken an interest in transgender employees, and a number of studies have been conducted to examine workplace issues for this previously neglected group (for example, Brewster et al., 2014; Budge et al., 2013; Dispenza et al., 2012). However, studies of transgender workers have typically been undertaken during or directly after they have transitioned to their preferred genders, so the research provides no information about long-term employment outcomes (Fosbrook, 2019). Moreover, studies have typically been conducted in North America or Europe, so this study addresses a gap in the literature on long-term employment issues for transgender workers in non-Western nations. Thus, this study intends to examine the work experiences of transgender employees in Thailand. There are three objectives in this research;

The aim of this research is to explore the work experiences of transgender employees in Thailand. The objectives are as follows:
1) To learn about the experiences of transgender employees and how they are treated in their workplaces
2) To assess transgender employees' wellbeing at work
3) To determine transgender employees' job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions

2. Literature Review

Transgender theory

Transgender theories are drawn from general feminist and queer theory, which overlap with theories about how the self is embodied and how gender and identity can be socially constructed (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). An example of the latter perspective is that of Butler (1990), who views gender as being social created via ritualized gender normative behaviors. Embodiment theories include those of Merleau-Ponty (1962, cited in Thanem, 2011), who rejected the idea of a separate mind and body, asserting that the body itself is socially constructed and capable of expressing thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Transgender people interviewed by Nagoshi et al (2012) tended to agree with prominent theorists that gender roles are social constructs and that true gender identities are typically fluid, not necessarily binary, and very different from the way they are defined by the heteronormative perspective. In line with the social constructivist perspective, transgender people may do a variety of things to express their true gender identities such as wearing different clothing, changing their names, referring to themselves with preferred pronouns, and physically changing their bodies through strength training, sex hormone therapy, and gender transition surgeries, though not all transgender people are interested in transitioning with surgery or hormones (Brewster et al., 2014).

Some transgender people who suffer from stigma, discrimination, and harassment develop depression and anxiety (Brewster et al., 2014; Budge et al., 2013) or unhealthy coping mechanisms such as abusing substances or overeating (Budge et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2011). However, many engage in a variety of positive behaviors that help them cope more effectively with problems in the workplace. These behaviors can be categorized as identity-based, cognitive, interpersonal, and advocacy strategies (Brewster et al., 2014). Identity-based strategies may include developing a sense of personal self-worth and self-efficacy as well as the language needed to describe their gender identity to others. Cognitive strategies involve reframing experiences and gender transitions as positive or even spiritual processes and developing a hopeful, optimistic outlook. Interpersonal strategies, which are social in nature, include seeking support from families and communities or consulting professionals for help. Advocacy strategies are political as they require social justice activism and other means of challenging oppression as well as being a role model for other transgender people.

Despite the challenges transgender people face, many cite positive aspects to their transgender identities, such as opportunities to develop resiliency and engage in personal growth, increased empathy and willing to fight for others who suffer injustice, finding other LGBTQ people with whom they can form supportive communities, and the unique perspectives they gain from having lived outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles (Riggle et al., 2011). The transgender employees who participated in Brewster et al.'s (2014) study tended to describe their gender transitions as "fulfilling," "gratifying," "free[ing]," "empowering," and "liberating," and although some described their transitions in negative terms such as "frustrating" or "overwhelming," bad experiences were often related to fears of mistreatment by coworkers or job loss rather than the transition itself (p. 165).

Principle of wellbeing at work

There is no commonly accepted definition of wellbeing, though certain elements are present in many of the definitions that have been proposed, including satisfaction (Headey & Wearing, 1991; Scanlan et al., 2013; Warr & Nielsen, 2018) and affect or emotional state (Diener & Suh, 1997; Headey & Wearing, 1991). Dodge et al. (2012) propose a multifaceted definition in which wellbeing arises from the degree to which a person's psychological, social, and physical resources are aligned with the challenges they face in each of these areas. If challenges are too low, the individual will be bored, but if the challenges are too overwhelming, the person will be stressed, anxious, or unhappy. Based on this definition, those who face too many challenges are more likely to suffer reduced wellbeing, and transgender workers face more challenges in the workplace than most.

Like general wellbeing, wellbeing at work has been defined in various ways, typically based on satisfaction,

affect, or engagement (Warr and Nielsen, 2018). A more comprehensive definition is provided by Fisher (2014), who conceptualizes wellbeing at work based on three components: subjective, eudaimonic, and social. The subjective dimension encompasses job satisfaction as well as a positive mood and attitude. The eudaimonic dimension includes engagement and meaning in work, professional or personal growth, intrinsic motivation, and the feeling of having a calling to fulfill. The social dimension arises from the quality of connections made and satisfaction with others in the workplace, including coworkers and leaders, and the social support provided by these individuals.

Researchers and employers are becoming increasingly interested in wellbeing at work due to rising awareness of the links between physical and psychological health and productive and profitable workplaces (Baptiste, 2008). Research reviews conducted by Scanlan et al. (2013) and Warr and Nielsen (2018) have shown that job satisfaction, engagement, affect, and burnout are most often used as indicators of general wellbeing at work. However, many different measures have been used to assess these dimensions of workplace wellbeing, some of which overlap. For example, engagement may be assessed based on motivation, enthusiasm, vigor, dedication, or absorption with work, and affect based on anxiety, depression, enthusiasm, or happiness. Job satisfaction measures may be focused on the job in general, specific tasks, or the human elements within the organization such as coworkers and supervisors as well as the overall social climate of the workplace. Burnout is typically assessed based on stress, exhaustion, and disengagement.

Longitudinal research has shown that both the satisfaction and emotional dimensions of wellbeing in the workplace are positively related to task performance, job behaviors, and organizational citizenship behaviors, and negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors and absenteeism (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). Thus, it is beneficial for organizations to increase employee wellbeing, and learning about the contributors to wellbeing at work is the first step toward developing HRM practices that promote satisfaction, engagement, and psychological health (Baptiste, 2008).

Transgender employees

Transgender employees are more likely to be discriminated against, harassed, denied promotions and jobs, or fired outright than cisgender workers (Badgett et al., 2009; Brewster et al., 2014; Budge et al., 2013; Fosbrook, 2019; Grant et al., 2011). One survey found that 71% of transgender workers hid their gender transitions from their coworkers and 57% delayed the transition surgery they desperately wanted due to fear of discrimination (Grant et al., 2011). Another found that most transgender employees had been subjected to various forms of hostile treatment such as ridicule and insults from

coworkers, sabotage by management, threats of violence, other forms of harassment, and exclusion from workplace social events (Brewster et al., 2014). To make matters worse, when transgender employees complain about mistreatment, their concerns are often dismissed as oversensitivity (Dispenza et al., 2012; Fosbrook, 2019).

Studies have shown that transgender employees who face discrimination in the workplace are more likely to suffer from stress, depression, and anxiety (Brewster et al., 2014; Budge et al., 2013; Dispenza et al., 2012) and to attempt suicide (Grant et al., 2011). Given the devastating effects of discrimination and harassment, King and Cortina (2010) argue that organizations have a moral imperative to address this problem because they share responsibility for the communities in which they operate. Thus, promoting wellbeing at work can be considered a social and moral issue. Fortunately, there are signs of improvement throughout the world. In 2002, only 3% of Fortune 500 companies had policies to protect against discrimination based on gender identity and none offered transgender-inclusive benefits; as of 2019, 85% had anti-discrimination policies to protect transgender employees and 62% offered inclusive benefits (Fosbrook, 2019). However, although many companies have adopted politically correct policies, this is often done just to maintain a good public image or avoid lawsuits, so these policies often fail to prevent discrimination in practice (Fosbrook, 2019).

Impact of job satisfaction on commitment and turnover intention

There is meta-analytic evidence indicating that job satisfaction is positively related to commitment and that commitment is negatively related to turnover intentions (Meyer, Stanley et al., 2002). Further evidence for relationships among job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover comes from Scanlan et al. (2013), who found that job satisfaction was a key aspect of wellbeing at work, and that it predicted 33% of the variation in employees' turnover intentions. For transgender employees, being discriminated against and having to hide their true gender identities negatively impacts their wellbeing and job satisfaction (Brewster et al., 2012), whereas a supportive work climate and being explicitly out as transgender increases satisfaction (Brewster et al., 2012; Drydakis, 2016). Moreover, because transgender employees are more likely to disclose their transgender status in supportive workplaces, the positive effects of satisfaction are increased via authenticity (Brewster et al., 2012; Law et al., 2011; Martinez et al.., 2017).

3. Research Methods and Materials

Quantitative methods are useful when precise measurement is required, whereas qualitative methods provide a greater depth of understanding for phenomena

that are subjective, complicated, and embedded within social contexts (Matveev, 2002). This research examines issues that are inseparable from the social context of the workplace and the larger society in which transgender people live, and the research objectives require collecting data on subjective experiences. Moreover, the goal of the study is to develop an in-depth understanding of the workplace issues transgender people face and how these situations affect the complex interplay of job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. Therefore, a qualitative methodology was developed based on the methodology used by Brewster et al. (2014) to examine transgender employee workplace issues and wellbeing in the U.S.

Deductive reasoning is used when the researcher begins with a general idea of something and then determines whether it applies in a specific context, whereas inductive reasoning begins with the observation of a specific phenomenon, which is then used to develop a more general theory (Hyde, 2000). Qualitative researchers typically apply inductive reasoning, but in some cases deductive processes (for example, theory testing via pattern matching) are better suited to a qualitative study (Hyde, 2000). Pattern matching is a technique in which observed patterns are compared to patterns that were predicted based on established theories (Sinkovics, 2018). For the current study, theorized relationships among job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions that have been confirmed by prior research were assessed in a specific case, that of transgender employees in Thailand, so a deductive pattern matching approach was used.

Data collection

Data were collected during a series of interviews because interviews are an effective way for researchers to gain insights into other people's perspectives of the world (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interviews were semi-structured, combining the use of predetermined questions (as with structured interviews) while still maintaining some flexibility. This approach ensured that important issues were addressed while allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions when clarification or elaboration were required (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face rather than via e-mail or phone because this method enables the interviewer to take social cues such as tone of voice and body language into account, which are an important aspect of overall communication that can provide information beyond what is said by the interviewee (Opdenakker, 2006). Such body language cues can indicate a need to seek clarification or elaboration on an issue if they do not match what is being said.

Data analysis

Content analysis, a commonly used method for analyzing qualitative interview data, was conducted to identify recurring elements in the interview transcripts.

This type of analysis involves creating codes to represent units of meaning, which can then be quantified based on the frequency of their appearance within a data set (Mayring, 2004). Content analysis may be undertaken as either an inductive or deductive process. When conducting inductive content analysis, the researcher develops content categories from the data, whereas with deductive content analysis, the units of meaning are predetermined based on an existing theoretical model (Mayring, 2004). Deductive content analysis was applied for this research because there were existing theoretical frameworks for wellbeing in the workplace and relationships among job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover that could be used to develop the content codes that would guide the analysis of the interview transcripts.

4. Results and Discussion

The result of this study was analyzing and synthesizing the interviewees ranging in age from 24 to 41 and representing a wide range of industries and jobs, shown in the table below (Table 1).

Table 1: The study participants

Code	Age	Education	Current position	Industry
E1	32	Bachelor of Fine and Applied Arts	Owner and designer	Clothing
E2	41	Bachelor of Business Administration (Accounting)	Business owner	Jewelry
E4	28	Bachelor of Arts (Humanities)	High school teacher	Education
E5	31	Bachelor of Business Management (Commerce)	Supervisor of client management	Marketing
E6	31	Bachelor of Innovative Business Management	Consultant	Plastic surgery
E7	32	MBA, Tourism Management	Business coordinator	Machinery
E8	30	Diploma	Manager, freelance singer	Food, entertain-ment
E9	32	Bachelor of Architecture, Communica-tion Design	Swimwear designer	Clothing
E10	24	Bachelor of Humanities (French)	Administra-tive secretary	Hotel
E11	36	Bachelor of Archaeology	Head of Customer Care	Bank

The following analysis is presented thematically. The interviewees' definitions of transgender are summarized in section 1 and their impressions of the openness of Thai society toward transgender people are examined in section 2 Wellbeing in the workplace is addressed in section 3 and job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions are

discussed in section 4 The analysis concludes with recommendations for improving the wellbeing of transgender employees in section 5

1 Definitions of transgender

While most of the respondents referred in some way to the difference between biological and lived or felt gender, there was some variation in definitions of transgender, reflecting the diversity of the transgender community. For example, E1 viewed transgender as a change to both the internal mind and external body that must be maintained on a daily basis and E6 said that transgender people tend to be more compassionate and sensitive due to the unique challenges they face:

E6: Understanding and sensitive more than other genders, which is the result of facing inequality problems in daily life.

However, slightly more than half of the interviewees said that transgender people are no different from those whose birth gender matches their gender preference. Table 2 lists transgender definition themes that were cited by multiple interviewees.

Table 2: Definitions of transgender

Defining characteristics	Defining characteristics
Difference between biological and felt/preferred gender	E1, E3, E5, E8, E9, E10, E11
Desire to change from biological gender to felt/preferred gender	E2, E5, E6, E7, E8, E10
Same as other genders	E3, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11

2 Openness of Thai society to transgender people

Responses to the question of whether Thai society is open to transgender people were mixed, reflecting differing perceptions and life experiences. Some of the interviewees noted that whether they could express themselves authentically varied from one context to the next, as some people were more accepting than others:

E9: Having problem [with lack of] personal understanding from family member because the family member [works in a] government office so that person has less understanding about transgender than others.

While most of the interviewees felt that Thai society is becoming increasingly open, perceptions of safety varied, with five of the interviewees noting that lack of legal protection and other forms of systemic discrimination are problematic. While the number of interviewees who said they could express themselves was higher than the number who said they could not live authentically in Thai society, in some cases this free expression could only take place with strangers (E7) or without disclosing birth gender (E11). Perceptions of openness to transgender people in Thai society that were cited by multiple interviewees are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Transgender people in Thai society

Aspects of Thai society	Interviewees
Acceptance/safety in some contexts/with some people but not others	E1, E2, E4, E6, E7, E11
Increasing societal openness	E1, E4, E5, E6, E7, E9, E10
Same as other genders Lack of openness	E2, E3, E11
Increasing awareness (but not acceptance)	E4, E8
Can express true self	E4, E5, E6, E7 (with strangers), E9, E11 (without revealing birth gender)
Cannot express true self	E3, E7 (with known people), E8
Feel safe/secure	E1, E5 (somewhat), E6, E7, E9, E10, E11 (some circumstances)
Feel unsafe/insecure	E2, E3, E4, E6, E8, E11 (some circumstances)

Aspects of Thai society	Interviewees
Lack of understanding/negative attitudes from others	E1, E2
Systemic discrimination (legal, travel, etc.)	E2, E4, E5, E6, E11

3 Wellbeing at work

There was substantial variation in the factors that contribute to wellbeing at work for transgender employees in Thailand, which may be attributable to industry differences. For example, E1 noted that discrimination is lower in the fashion industry where there is greater acceptance of transgender people. Four of the study participants said they had been teased, subjected to judgmental comments, or otherwise disrespected, and some felt insecure at work. However, all received equal treatment from their supervisors, typically describing them as "friendly" and "understanding," and most got along well with their colleagues, though E6 felt safe only with familiar people and insecure around strangers encountered in the workplace whose attitudes toward transgender people are unknown:

E6: Not secure with stranger since worrying about the attitude of the stranger about transgender, so I decide to keep it a secret to be safe.

E8 said that colleagues would treat transgender coworkers fairly, but only if they transitioned before starting work at the organization. In other words, they could accept a transgender coworker only if they did not witness the transformation.

While only one respondent (E4) cited discrimination in financial compensation and promotion, two said that insurance or benefits practices were discriminatory and most referred to discriminatory hiring practices, particularly with large companies or certain types of jobs:

E3: For example, top bank contacts me, but when they know that I'm transgender, they just disappear.

E1 said that because of hiring discrimination, transgender people must prove themselves more than other employees and have special skills to get hired. Despite these issues, five of the interviewees said they felt safe or secure at work, though six referred to feelings of insecurity or experiencing other negative emotional states in the workplace. Overall, the responses indicate that despite being well-treated by supervisors, some transgender employees in Thailand suffer discrimination or harassment by colleagues as well as systemic discrimination, which threaten their wellbeing at work. Contributors to workplace wellbeing (or lack thereof) that were cited by multiple interviewees are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Wellbeing at work

Wellbeing indicators	Interviewees
Hiring discrimination	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E9, E10, E11
Insurance/benefits discrimination	E1, E7
Harassment at work (teasing, insults, negative judgement, disrespect, etc.)	E1, E4, E5, E7
Discrimination from colleagues	E5, E6, E7
Positive/equal treatment from colleagues	E2, E3, E4, E8, E9, E10, E11
Positive/equal treatment from supervisors	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11
Negative emotional states related to work (insecure, anxious, etc.)	E1, E3, E4, E5, E6, E8
Positive emotional states related to work (secure, safe, etc.)	E2, E6, E7, E9, E10

4 Job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions

Many of the interviewees were satisfied with their work and some indicated their affective commitment by saying they loved their organizations, were bonded with them, or felt comfortable with them, though E6 also indicated continuance commitment by staying with the organization for the benefits it provides. Only three of the interviewees said they felt dissatisfied or disengaged from their organizations, though in one case, lack of engagement was due to short duration with the company rather than problems with the work environment. Most of the employees who described themselves as dissatisfied or unable to be fully authentic at work had considered leaving their organizations. Although a few who said they were satisfied also had plans to leave, in these cases it was usually for positive reasons such as wanting to try new things or pursue further education. Overall, the responses indicate that those who are well-treated at work tend to be more satisfied and committed to their workplaces. The importance of antidiscrimination policies in the workplace was emphasized by E11, who attributed personal satisfaction with work to guidelines that prevented mistreatment:

E11: [I am satisfied] due to clear rules and regulations regarding antidiscrimination between personnel within the organization.

Table 5 provides a summary of responses to questions about workplace satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions (some interviewees did not respond to all questions in this section).

Table 5: Satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions

Indicator	Measure	Interviewees
Satisfaction	Satisfied/engaged with own ork/job/workplace	E1, E2, E5, E6, E8, E9, E11
	Able to be authentic/out/ freely self-expressive	E1, E2, E5, E6, E8, E9, E10, E11
	Dissatisfied	E3, E4 (somewhat), E7
Commitment	Committed	E6, E7, E8, E9, E10, E11
	Disengaged	E3, E4, E5 (due to short duration with the company rather than dissatisfaction)
Turnover intentions	Plans to seek different employment	E3, E4, E7, E8 (to try something new), E9 (to pursue higher education), E11, (due to issue with work content rather than treatment)
	No plans to seek new employment	E1, E5, E6, E10
	No response	E2

5. Recommendations to improve workplaces for transgender employees

The interviewees made a number of recommendations to improve the situation for transgender workers, ranging from more egalitarian insurance and recruiting policies to rights protection to changing societal mindsets. Individual interviewees also noted that they would like the right to take leave from work for transition surgery (E10) and to choose which personal information to disclose (E11). However, eliminating hiring discrimination was the most frequently cited suggestion for making work more transgender-friendly. Recommendations made by multiple interviewees are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Recommendations to improve workplaces for transgender employees

Recommendation	Interviewees
Change benefits policies (health, marriage, etc.) to not discriminate against transgender people	E1, E7
Protect rights of transgender people to be themselves/ensure equal rights of self-expression	E2, E6, E7
Change societal mindsets/perspectives on transgender people	E3, E4, E8, E9
Eliminate hiring discrimination to provide equal career opportunities	E3, E4, E5, E6, E8, E9, E11

Discussion

The wellbeing of transgender employees is threatened by discrimination, both from employers and colleagues, which often forces them to lead inauthentic lives in their 27 workplaces, denying their true gender identities (Fosbrook, 2019). Research has shown that discrimination from employers and social rejection or harassment by coworkers can result in significant psychological distress (Brewster et al., 2014). The transgender employees who participated in this study had all experienced hiring discrimination and some had also suffered discrimination in the workplace, typically from coworkers rather than supervisors, with disrespect or harassment causing them to feel anxious or insecure. Research has shown that transgender workers may also experience outright rejection or a lack of social support in the workplace (Brewster et al., 2014). However, most of the Thai transgender employees who participated in this study had good or neutral social experiences with the majority of their colleagues, so complete rejection may not be as common in Thailand as elsewhere. However, some of the study participants were not completely out as transgender at work due to concerns about how they might be treated, which accords with the findings of prior research indicating that fear of discrimination or harassment can cause transgender people to hide their true gender identities (Grant et al., 2011). This is a serious problem because lack of congruence between outward appearance and gender identity is associated with increased anxiety and depression and reduced life satisfaction and meaning (Kozee et al., 2012). While most of the participants in the current study said they could be themselves at work to varying degrees, some felt that they could only be authentic with certain people and in certain contexts. Moreover, one said that authenticity was possible only if the gender transition was made before starting at a workplace and the prior gender identity was not disclosed, indicating a need to hide transgender status. The study participants who were able to be authentic at work tended to be more satisfied with their jobs or organizations, whereas those who had to hide their true gender identities were more likely to be unhappy and dissatisfied. These findings accord with those of a survey conducted by Grant et al. (2011) in which 78% of transgender people who had transitioned 28 were more comfortable at work as well as other research linking workplace authenticity with wellbeing and satisfaction (Brewster et al., 2012; Drydakis, 2016). However, the ability to be authentic at work likely depends on other societal changes, as the workplace reflects the broader society in which it operates. Although most of the study participants agreed that Thailand is becoming increasingly open to transgender people, acceptance varies significantly by situation, place, or social group, and some of the study participants said they still felt insecure or even unsafe in Thai society. Moreover, many noted systemic discrimination rooted in legal and social inequalities. The findings of this research provide evidence for the proposed theoretical linkages among job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Past research has shown that job satisfaction is positively related to employee commitment and retention (Badgett et al., 2013; Law et al., 2011; Meyer et al., 2002; Punnakitikashem et al., 2019; Scanlan et al., 2013; UNDP, 2018) whereas commitment is negatively related to turnover intentions (Badgett et al., 2013). Participants in the current study who described themselves as satisfied with their jobs or organizations were more likely to indicate their affective commitment, which is a strong form of commitment based on affinity for and positive attitudes toward an organization (Law et al., 2011). Moreover, as would be expected based on the findings of prior research, the dissatisfied employees were less likely to be committed to their organizations and more likely to leave due to dissatisfaction (some satisfied employees also intended to leave, but this was more often for positive reasons such as wanting to try something new or pursue more further education). Other researchers have linked satisfaction to wellbeing at work (Headey & Wearing, 1991; Scanlan et al., 2013; Warr & Nielsen, 2018), and the findings of this study provide further evidence for the wellbeing-satisfaction link, indicating that enhancing wellbeing could increase commitment and reduce turnover intentions by improving job satisfaction. 29 Prior research has shown that the wellbeing of transgender people in the workplace can be significantly increased by providing a supportive social climate, nongendered spaces and dress requirements (i.e., bathrooms, locker rooms, uniforms, etc.), and good physical and mental health care benefits and legal protections in the form of antidiscrimination laws and policies (Brewster et al., 2014; Phoenix & Ghul, 2016). Recommendations made by the transgender employees who participated in the current study overlapped with these suggestions, as they included doing things to alter the wider social climate in society and ensure equality with more supportive benefits and legal protections. However, one of the most significant concerns expressed by more than half of the study participants was hiring discrimination, indicating that access to employment is among the most serious work-related problems transgender people face.

Conclusions

The objectives of this research were to learn about the experiences of transgender employees in Thailand and how they are treated at work, assess their wellbeing, and determine their job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions. Regarding the first two objectives, the experiences of transgender employees in Thailand are mixed. While they are typically well-treated by supervisors, some have been harassed or disrespected by colleagues, all have experienced hiring discrimination, and several noted that laws and benefits programs are often discriminatory toward transgender people. Moreover, while some transgender employees can be

authentic at work, others must hide their true gender identities because they are more accepted in certain industries and social contexts than others. These problems cause some transgender people to feel anxious or insecure in the workplace and in Thai society. These variations in wellbeing are reflected by corresponding variations in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. Some transgender employees describe themselves as satisfied and others as disengaged from their work. Those who are satisfied are more likely to show commitment to their organizations as indicated by positive attitudes and emotional attachment to them. On the other hand, those who are disengaged show no commitment to their organizations and are more likely to seek other work due to unhappiness with their jobs. Although transgender employees may look for work elsewhere for reasons other than mistreatment in the workplace, those who are discriminated against, harassed, or forced to hide their true gender identities are more likely to be miserable, dissatisfied, uncommitted, and interested in finding new employment to escape their current situations. 31 The problems that negatively affect transgender employees' wellbeing, satisfaction, and organizational commitment could be mitigated by eliminating the systemic discrimination (particularly hiring discrimination) that leads to high rates of unemployment and poverty for transgender people and by changing negative societal and workplace attitudes. Thai society's increasing openness to transgender people and the fact that transgender employees are accepted by the majority of their supervisors and colleagues provides support for the theory that gender is a social construct and can therefore be adapted to accommodate those whose gender does not match the one they were assigned at birth.

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